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Gallery and Studio

WILLIAM ANDERSON COFFIN.



THE subject of the present notice, whose features are happily reproduced in the accompanying portrait, is one of the most talented of our younger American painters. His work shows marked individuality, especially in that out-of-doors, in which we find genuine feeling for the

beauties of nature, expressed with broad, effective technic. Mr. Coffin's "Moonlight in Harvest," which won the second Hallgarten prize last year at the National Academy Exhibition, was a successful rendering of a difficult effect. It is in the field of landscape, we think, that this young artist should look for future laurels, although that he has claims for recognition in genre painting probably no one would deny who has seen his clever little study of a "partie de billard," in Mr. Thomas B. Clarke's gallery; and this was one of his early efforts.

Mr. Coffin is not yet thirty-three years old. Born in Alleghany City, Pa., he was graduated from Yale in 1874. In a desultory way he drew from the cast in the art school connected with the college, and was thus led to take up drawing seriously. In 1877 he went to Paris, where, after some months' study from the antique, he passed two years in the atelier of Bonnat. A view of the life school at work there was the subject of his first picture in the Paris Salon, to which he also contributed in 1880 and 1882. Mr. Coffin returned to Bonnat's atelier for a while after a brief stay in America, and is now established in New York. He is a member of the Society of American Artists, is favorably known as an art instructor, and has written for the daily press.

TALKS WITH ARTISTS.

IV.—RECOLLECTIONS OF MR. W. A. COFFIN OF BONNAT'S LIFE SCHOOL.

"We place too much stress on what the master can do for us over here," said Mr. W. A. Coffin. "After all, we have to learn to see for ourselves and to put down with our own hands what we see."

"I joined Bonnat's studio in the spring of 1878, and was with him altogether three years. He was then at the height of his reputation. He was supposed to criticise twice a week, but sometimes he didn't come for three weeks."

"I had been making some studies during the summer, and when the studio opened I had them ready to show to Bonnat and get his advice about a picture. I waited three weeks, and as he didn't come I took them to his private studio and explained my reasons, venturing to remark I had been waiting three weeks."

"Three weeks!" he laughed. "That is nothing; sometimes le père Cogniet* didn't come for a year."

"What was the direction of Bonnat's criticism?"

"At first it was confined to but two or three points. In black and white he considered form, proportion, and movement. No man was supposed to touch color until he had acquired fair skill in drawing. Or if he did he was careful not to show it to Bonnat."

* His own master, under whom many of the great French painters of our day studied.

"In criticising studies in color, Bonnat concerned himself principally with values. You might paint flesh in a bluish, reddish or yellowish tone and he wouldn't speak of it, simply because he didn't pretend to set up the way he saw color as a standard for another."

"Still, did it not have its influence?"

"In all our class there was but one man who deliberately imitated Bonnat's painting. He did, but the influence over there is dead set against everything of that sort. Masters are very careful to respect individualities, and not to impose their own."

"When greater proficiency was made, and the important things placed on a firm foundation, Bonnat considered the work more in detail. Still there was not much latitude and longitude in his criticism. He said the same thing to me for three months at a time, throwing in now and then a little encouragement."



WILLIAM ANDERSON COFFIN. DRAWN BY HIMSELF.

"How was the studio managed?"

"Very much like all life classes. There were forty men in the morning class and sixty in the night class. The model stood on a platform, and we were ranged around in a semicircle five rows deep. The first row sat on low, straw-covered stools, with low easels. These were graduated, and the hindmost row was perched on high stools."

"How was the choice of seats determined; for there was evidently choice?"

"The men were divided into series of ten, and every Monday morning each series in rotation had the choice of seats."

"The pose, as is usual, was voted on by the students, and until after the third hour of the Monday sitting the pose could always be changed by a vote. The pose was for never less than an hour, with ten minutes' rest, and the sitting four hours. The same pose was kept for a week."

"The massière took charge of everything, paid expenses, engaged models. We paid him our fees and he was supposed to render an account once a year, and although I don't think it ever was done in the three years I was there, everything was satisfactory."

"In the afternoon we had a class of our own; then we could paint or draw as we chose, and submit our work to Bonnat in his morning visits. Although this was our own affair, if Bonnat found a man painting whose drawing was defective, he usually told him to go back to his drawing, with a remark that 'he didn't know enough to paint yet.'"

"As Bonnat received nothing for his services, his only interest in us or the studio was on its artistic side. Still, when we thought it a good joke to burlesque the fête of the 30th of May, in honor of the Republic, by some comic cartoons placed on the walls outside, and

illuminations in the daytime, he wrote a note saying that he should not visit the studio again until amends were made. This was not because of any cherished political opinions, but because he deemed it undignified and unworthy."

"Personally, he was very friendly to the men of his class. We occasionally visited him at his house, when his treatment was not only friendly but comrade-like. He always impressed us as a sturdily honest man, with no more pretension in the day of his success than he might have had as a student. His charm was in his simplicity."

MADAME DE CASSIN'S PICTURES.

IN an immense mansion, fitted up in perfect taste, at the head of the Champs Elysée, facing the Arc de Triomphe, lives alone the wealthy and cultivated Mme. de Cassin, owner of one of the choicest collections of ancient and modern paintings in Paris. The number of her visitors is very limited, so that when, a year or so ago, she sent her pictures to the Petit gallery for exhibition for the benefit of the Société Philanthropique, the event aroused great interest in artistic circles, which was enhanced by the well-founded rumor that Mme. de Cassin at her death intended to leave to the Louvre the pick of the collection.

There were fifty pictures, admirably hung, each sufficiently isolated by surrounding wall-space to enable it to be seen to the full advantage of its tone and coloring. The insurance policy was for \$600,000, which would give to each picture an average value of \$12,000. At the end of the room, in the

place of honor, was Regnault's "Salomé," standing out triumphantly on its yellow background. Salomé with her long black curly hair framing her sensual face looks happy. She is a pure animal, this Salomé, as she sits there presenting with a smile her ferocious request to Herod. The daughter of Herodias is supposed to have just finished her dance; she lets fall to the ground her veil of gauze embroidered with gold like her skirt, and with the basin and knife on her knees, she says: "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on this salver." A curtain of yellow silk, on which the sun is shining brilliantly, brings into strong relief the intense blackness of her hair, and the diaphanous, polished skin, and adds greatly to the strangeness of the picture. The expression of Salomé's face—"poodle-happy," so to speak, at the success of her dancing—the caressing shyness of her eyes, the wonderful animation of the face on this triumphant yellow background, make the picture fascinating in the